

The Cubist Experimentation of Mário de Sá-Carneiro

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Keywords

Cubism, Futurism, Avant-Gardes, Modernism, Intersectionism, “Manucure”, Paris.

Abstract

Mário de Sá-Carneiro occupies a central role in transmitting the main influences of the Parisian avant-gardes to Portuguese Modernism, a role facilitated by his close contact with the main esthetic debates of the day taking place in the French capital. This paper analyzes the contacts of Mário de Sá-Carneiro with these avant-gardes, his confessed belief in the potential of Cubism, and his clear awareness of and adhesion to the main arguments in defense of that movement at the time. It also characterizes Sá-Carneiro’s Cubist experimentation, by focusing on “Manucure,” an example of a text from *Orpheu* that doubly represents those influences and experimentation, both in its attempt to challenge the literary field and society, and through the incorporation, original at the time, of Cubist topics and techniques gleaned from the plastic arts, as perceived by the poet.

Palavras-chave

Cubismo, Futurismo, Vanguardas, Modernismo, Interseccionismo, “Manucure”, Paris.

Resumo

Mário de Sá-Carneiro ocupa um lugar central na transmissão das influências fundamentais das vanguardas parisienses no Modernismo português, um papel facilitado pelo seu contacto com os debates estéticos principais que tinham lugar na capital francesa. Este trabalho analisa os contactos de Mário de Sá-Carneiro com estas vanguardas, a assumida crença do autor no potencial expressivo da linguagem Cubista, e a sua clara adesão aos principais argumentos em defesa deste estilo apresentados nesse período. Caracteriza-se ainda a experimentação Cubista de Sá-Carneiro, sobretudo em “Manucure”, um exemplo de texto de *Orpheu* que representa duplamente essas influências, tanto pela sua atitude de desafio ao meio literário e à sociedade, como pela incorporação, original à época, de tópicos e técnicas Cubistas das artes plásticas tais como percebidos pelo poeta.

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One of the ways in which the Portuguese poet Mário de Sá-Carneiro represents the experience of a subject in the modern society and urban space, particularly that of Paris,¹ while demonstrating his commitment to the esthetic debates and developments taking place in the French capital in his time, is through a poetic experimentation with a Cubist figuration. Although attempted in other works by Sá-Carneiro as well, this is particularly visible in “Manucure,” a poem published in the second issue of the magazine *Orpheu* (1915), and one that, as will be seen ahead, has historically been recognized as a Futurist exercise. The poem sometimes has also been regarded as a form of provocative joke, a “blague,” to use Fernando Pessoa’s word to describe it (1999: 375) and one often used by Sá-Carneiro as well in other contexts. As I will demonstrate ahead, “Manucure” incorporates an experimental form of Cubist representation, largely owing to Sá-Carneiro’s presence in Paris and contacts with that movement, which I will also document. In fact, in multiple passages of “Manucure” we can find the subject represented as immersed in a Cubist portrait or setting, as happens with the lines that present him in a Café under the influence of “A thousand colors in the Air, a thousand throbbing vibrations, | Distant misty planes | [that] Drop down sinuously, shifting streaks, flexing discs” (41-42),² or “Knots, italics, arrows, wings, — in multicolor dust —” (45) [“Mil cores no Ar, mil vibrações latejantes, | Brumosos planos desviados | Abatendo flechas, listas volúveis, discos flexíveis, | [que] Chegam tenuemente a perfilar-me”, “Laços, grifos, setas, ases – na poeira multicolor”]. As happens in diverse moments throughout “Manucure,” these lines can be perceived as ekphrastic representations of a plausible prolix and polychromatic Cubist painting, which resorts to a shattering representation of the real, based on the blurring together or the intersection or superposition of multiples angles.

An association between Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Cubism has already been done by Alfredo Margarido, who believed the poet had learned about this style mostly through his contact with Guilherme de Santa-Rita. Also known as Santa-Rita Pintor, the latter was a Modernist Portuguese painter who lived in Paris at the time and died at the age of twenty-nine, leaving the express request that his works be destroyed upon his death. In these works he is thought to have engaged

¹ I have characterized Sá-Carneiro’s representation of the experience of the modern subject in the urban space, one which often emphasizes the dynamic relation resulting from the fact that this is peripheral individual in a central modernity, in “Painting the Nails with a Parisian Polish – Modern Dissemination and Central Redemption in the Poetry of Mário de Sá-Carneiro” (Vasconcelos, 2013).

² The page numbers that accompany all quotations refer to the Portuguese originals found on the collection of Sá-Carneiro’s *Verso e Prosa* (2010), edited by Fernando Cabral Martins. Despite the indication according to which it is “Under continual revision,” I use the good translation of “Manucure” available in the website <<http://sa-carneiro.blogspot.com/>> (with no page numbers), and I indicate whenever I make any change to it. Regardless of my efforts, I could not identify the author of this translation.

particularly with Cubo-Futurism, in line with the collages that were reproduced in the second volume of the literary journal *Orpheu*.

The earlier letters sent by Mário de Sá-Carneiro to Fernando Pessoa toward the end of 1912 and in early 1913 illustrate the cohabitation of Sá-Carneiro with Santa-Rita, a relation marked by the apparently extravagant behavior of Santa-Rita and his proximity to the Cubist movement. As pointed out by Margarido, when Sá-Carneiro refers to the Cubist authors early on in his correspondence with Fernando Pessoa, in the last quarter of 1912, he never mentions Braque, for example. And in his letter to Pessoa of December 10, 1912, less than two months after having arrived in Paris, a letter in which he criticizes Santa-Rita for wholeheartedly adhering to Cubism, Sá-Carneiro demonstrates his ignorance of Max Jacob's works. Margarido infers from the relation portrayed in Sá-Carneiro's letters that Santa-Rita was the person responsible for in the meantime introducing the style to Sá-Carneiro, and for the "several works" by Picasso that Sá-Carneiro claims to know, in a letter sent a few months later (Margarido: 1990: 94). Margarido also points out a number of references in Sá-Carneiro's fiction that illustrate his acquaintance with works by Picasso, Léger, Gris, Henri Matisse, Derain or Archipenko, demonstrating beyond doubt that the Portuguese poet had a chance of familiarizing himself with their work.

It is worth analyzing in more detail the moment in which Mário de Sá-Carneiro is not only familiarizing himself with Cubism, but also, I argue, supporting the potential of this movement. In a letter dated March 10, 1913, precisely three months after the one mentioned previously (December 10, 1912), with regard to a satire aimed at Cubism and Santa-Rita, published in the Portuguese magazine *Teatro*, Sá-Carneiro demonstrates a new attitude about the Cubist movement. The passage, whose manuscript is presented below, demonstrates a growth in the appreciation of the potentialities of the style, and illustrates an understanding of its scope that, in my view, contributes to interpret instances of his own poetry, as will become clearer ahead:

Nevertheless, I confess to you, my dear [Fernando] Pessoa, that *without being mad*, I believe in cubism. I mean: I believe in cubism, but not in the cubist paintings created until today. But I can only be appreciative of those who, in their effort, instead of reproducing little cows grazing and the faces of more or less naked madams – try to interpret *a dream, a sound, a state of the soul, a movement of the air*, etc. What happens is that, taken by exaggerations of a school, fighting with the difficulties of an anxiety that, if it were satisfied, would be genial, their works defeat, astonish, provoke the laughter of those who take this lightly. However, my dear, how unusual and incomprehensible are many of the admirable sonnets by Mallarmé. *And we understand them*. Why? Because the artist was genial and fulfilled his intention. Perhaps the cubists have not yet accomplished theirs. That's all. [...] In sum, I believe in the intentions of the cubists; I simply consider them artists who have not yet accomplished what they want.

[(63a^r) No entanto, confesso-lhe, meu caro Pessoa, que *sem estar doido*, eu acredito no cubismo. Quero dizer: acredito no cubismo, mas não nos quadros cubistas até hoje executados. Mas não me podem deixar de ser simpáticos aqueles que, num esforço, tentam, em vez de reproduzir vaquinhas a pastar e caras de madamas mais ou menos nuas – antes³ interpretar *um sonho, um som, um estado de alma, uma deslocação do ar* etc. Simplesmente levados a exaustos de escola, lutando com as dificuldades duma ansia que, se fosse satisfeita, seria genial, as suas obras, derrotam, (63a^v) espantam, fazem rir os levianos. Entretanto, meu caro, tão estranhos e incompreensíveis são m[u]ltos dos sonetos admiráveis de Mallarmé. *E nós compreendemo-los*. Porquê? Porque o artista foi genial e realizou a sua intenção. Os cubistas talvez ainda não a realizassem. Eis tudo. (...) (63^v) Resumindo: eu creio nas intenções dos cubistas; simplesmente os considero artistas que não realizaram aquilo que pretendem.]

The passage shows that, at the end of the first quarter of 1913, Mário de Sá-Carneiro's support for the creative and expressive potential of Cubism and its goals as he perceives them is clear. In fact, this support seems moderated only by the fear of shocking Fernando Pessoa, who was not as receptive to the style, as has already been noted by Margarido (1990: 94-96). Arguably, it might even have been due to Pessoa's devaluation of this style that Sá-Carneiro spoke so little in his letters about the exact extent of his contacts with Cubist artists and circles that might have made him change his mind, as he no doubt did. We can imagine that Mário de Sá-Carneiro may have had several opportunities to contact with Cubism, through Santa-Rita or in other ways, but there are definite elements that provide hints of his exposure to the movement. In the first letter mentioned above, of December 10, 1912, Sá-Carneiro criticizes Santa-Rita's unconditional admiration for Picasso, which would arguably go as far as to lead the Portuguese painter to imitate Picasso's handwriting. In that context, Sá-Carneiro claims to have had "in [his] hand a letter by Picasso" (2001: 24), in which those similarities became evident to him.

We also know that Sá-Carneiro followed and contacted different Parisian literary magazines, in his attempt to popularize in Europe his own prose and other Portuguese creations. He reads the *Mercure de France*, tells Fernando Pessoa he is waiting for the section "Lettres portugaises" to be published (2001: 21) and in fact sends to Pessoa the edition of January 1, 1913, which includes that section written by Philéas Lebesgue, in which Pessoa's essay "A Nova Geração" ["The New Generation"], published in the journal *Águia*, is applauded, and where a brief note on Sá-Carneiro's book *Principio* is included (Lebesgue: 1913: 209-214).

³ In the original: "<pretendem> [↑ antes, <digo,>] interpretar *um sonho* [...]".

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Fig. 1. BNP/EP, 115^a- 63a^r (detail).

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Fig. 2. BNP/EP, 115^a- 63a^v (detail).

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Fig. 3. BNP/EP, 115^a- 63^v (detail).

Sá-Carneiro was also a follower of the magazine *Comoedia illustré* even when he was still in Lisbon, and while in Paris he comments to Pessoa on the fact that the magazine's editor, Pawlowski, announced the publication of *Principio*, having given it comparatively more space than Lebesgue (2001: 30). Sá-Carneiro's interest in these publications illustrates his intention to be in touch with the French literary field and its main critics.⁴

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nitz, qui donne aussi **Those United States**, un ouvrage d'Arnold Bennett sur lequel nous reviendrons.

HENRY-D. DAVRAY.

LETTRES PORTUGAISES

La nouvelle génération. — *A Águia*, organe de la société *Renascença portuguesa*; Porto. — Jaime Cortesão: *Esta história é para os Anjos*; *Renascença portuguesa*, Porto. — Augusto Casimiro: *A Evocação da Vida*; França Amado, éditeur, Coimbra. — Leonardo Coimbra: *O Creacionismo*; *Renascença portuguesa*, Porto. — Almachio Diniz: *Da Esthetica na litteratura comparada*; Garnier frères, Paris. — Marcel Lami: *Terres d'aventures*; Louis Michaud, Paris. — *Luz d'Orient* (*L'Enigme du Ramayana*); Ponda-Goà, Inde portugaise. — Memento.

Nous nous sommes élevé trop de fois, ici même, contre l'imitation exclusive de modèles étrangers en matière d'art littéraire, ces modèles fussent-ils destinés à servir l'expansion d'idées françaises, pour ne pas applaudir de toutes nos forces à l'évolution actuelle de la Poésie portugaise et au mouvement littéraire inauguré par la **nouvelle génération**. Ce mouvement littéraire se manifeste, en effet, comme absolument national, sans emprunts directs d'aucune sorte: « Il a ses idées, ses sentiments, ses modes d'expression bien distincts », affirme à juste titre Fernando Pessoa; il aspire à éliminer toute espèce d'influence étrangère, ou plutôt à en absorber au sein de l'esprit national les éléments assimilables. Les promoteurs de la *Renaissance portugaise*, dont l'organe principal est la revue *l'Aigle* publiée à Porto, pensent que l'heure a sonné pour le Portugal de retrouver son âme intégrale, non pas pour retourner vers le passé, mais pour créer une vie nouvelle, pour donner un sens à toutes les énergies de la Race. « Depuis Viriathe, l'âme lusitanienne existe et palpite, dit T. de Pascoaes; elle s'est faite action et victoire avec Vasco de Gama, verbe immortel avec Camoens. »

Fig. 4. Lebesgue's analysis, in the *Mercure de France*, of Pessoa's article "A nova poesia portuguesa sociologicamente considerada", which had been published in *A Águia* (Lebesgue, 1913: 209). Pessoa's article is also available in Pessoa (1999: 7-17).

⁴ Although the referred magazines were mostly devoted to more mainstream styles, on December 20, 1913, the *Comoedia illustré* published an article by Raynal called "Qu'est-ce que... le Cubisme?", which is symptomatic of both the different focus of the publication and the relevance in the meantime acquired by the Cubist movement.

l'on rencontre dans les contes mythiques des Celtes. Quant à Rama, il n'aurait été identifié à Vischnou que beaucoup plus tard, à l'époque du bouddhisme, et lorsque le poème dut être remanié pour raisons religieuses. Le *Ramayana*, les *Lusiades*, la double conquête de l'Inde l'une par terre, l'autre par mer ! Toute la découverte de la terre est incluse en ces deux Bibles qui mêlent l'Orient à l'Europe, et auxquelles les conjonctures du présent gardent une actualité singulière.

MEMENTO. — Reçu *Princípio*, contes de Mario de Sa-Carneiro ; *Soluções positivas da Política portuguesa* de, Théophilo Braga ; *O Passado*, d'Eduardo de Noronha ; *Sombras*, de Veiga Simões.

PHILÉAS LEBESGUE.

Fig. 5. Lebesgue's mention, in the last paragraph, to having just received Sá-Carneiro's *Princípio* (Lebesgue, 1913: 214).

At this point, it is relevant to consider what Mário de Sá-Carneiro's contacts with the avant-garde circles may have been, and what pieces of information we have, given that, in my view, Sá-Carneiro recurrently demonstrates a clear knowledge of the main discussions of the day.

We can only conjecture about the extent of Sá-Carneiro's circulation in the Parisian literary circles, since his letters to Pessoa and others in Portugal often leave out this topic. It is also impossible to know the degree to which Mário Sá-Carneiro may have been familiarized specifically with the articles about Cubism published by Guillaume Apollinaire, its most important advocate, even if the affinities between the poetry of both authors are visible and have been pointed out.⁵ Apollinaire published extensively on Cubism and its authors during the year of 1912, in his literary magazine *Soirées de Paris* and, in the following year, in *The Cubist Painters*, in fact a "collage manuscript" of new fragments and the articles published until then (Read, 2004: 102). We also do know that Sá-Carneiro had contact with this journal in particular. In fact, in the letter to Fernando Pessoa of 18 November 1914, Sá-Carneiro mockingly addresses Apollinaire's calligrams, which had been presented in what he calls a "Semaine de Paris" in the previous summer. The reference is of course a lapse, as Sá-Carneiro was talking about *Les soirées de Paris*, as has been noted already by Arnaldo Saraiva (1980: 86). The postcard, satirically calligramatic, authorized Fernando Pessoa, in Lisbon, to lend the magazine to Augusto de Santa Rita (Guilherme de Santa Rita's brother), indicating that it in fact belonged to Sá-Carneiro.

⁵ Fernando Cabral Martins lists multiple affinities between the poetries of Apollinaire and Sá-Carneiro, namely the shared support for an avant-garde attitude, in Apollinaire's "L'Antitradition futuriste" and Sá-Carneiro's "Manucure," the creation of "poèmes épistolaires," and several *topoi* of other poems that illustrate a break with Decadentism and the search for a "Esprit Nouveau" (1994: 306-307). Elsewhere I also point out affinities namely with regard to avant-guerre *topoi* engaged by both authors (2013: 148-150).

At the same time, other critics were also publishing studies on the new style, and, as Peter Read has argued, when “*The Cubist Painters* left the presses on 17 March 1913, public interest in Cubism was at a peak” (2004: 106). And the coincidence is in fact surprising: Apollinaire’s *Les Peintres cubistes* left the presses precisely one week after Sá-Carneiro stated in his letter to Pessoa, of March 10 1913, that he believed in the potential of the Cubist style.

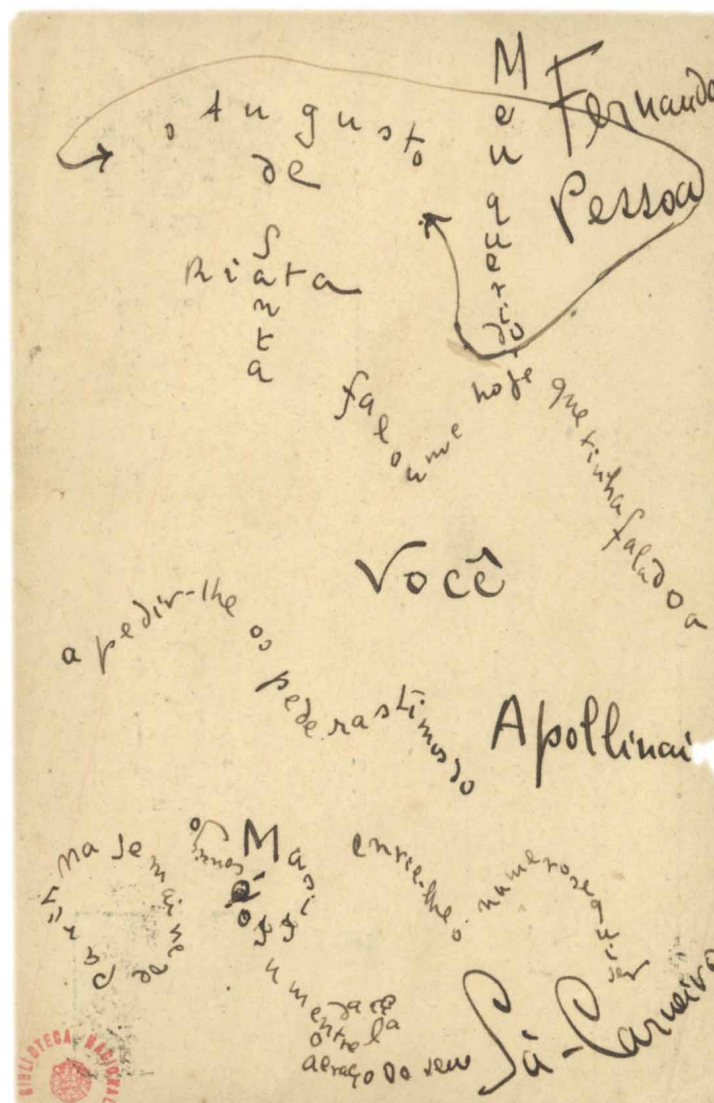


Fig. 6. Postcard sent by Mário de Sá-Carneiro to Fernando Pessoa, dated “November 1914 | Day 18”:

“My dear | Fernando Pessoa | Augusto | de Santa Riata [sic] | told he had spoken with | You | to ask for Apollinaire’s | jokes | in the Semaine de Paris | Send him the magazine if you wish | But that’s up to you | Sending you an interlaced hug | Sá-Carneiro” [“Meu querido | Fernando Pessoa | o Augusto de | Santa Riata [sic] | falou-me hoje que tinha falado a | Você | a pedir-lhe os pederasti[s]mos do | Apollinaire | na Semaine de Paris | Envie-lhe o numero se quiser | Mas isso é consigo | um entrelaçado abraço do seu | Sá-Carneiro”] (BNP/E3, 115^v-111^v).

Even if it is impossible to know specifically what kind of contact Mário de Sá-Carneiro had with any of these popularizing texts, first-hand or not, it is clear that he was familiar with the main discussions of the day with regard to the Cubist movement, with the most important debates that were being raised, and that he expressed views that are very close to those presented in Apollinaire's articles. Mário de Sá-Carneiro's confessed admiration, in March 10, 1913, for the Cubists' non-mimetic approach, synthetized as a refusal to reproduce "little cows grazing and the faces of more or less naked madams" which I have cited is in line with a statement by Apollinaire in the text "On the subject in Modern Painting," the opening article of the very first *Les Soirées de Paris*, of February 1912 (Read, 2004: 127), afterwards included in *The Cubist Painters*. In the article, Apollinaire states that "[r]esemblance no longer has the slightest importance, for the artist sacrifices everything to the truths and imperatives of a higher nature which he can envisage without ever having encountered it. Subject-matter now counts for little or nothing at all" (2004: 11-12) ["La vraisemblance n'a plus aucune importance, car tout est sacrifié par l'artiste aux vérités, aux nécessités d'une nature supérieure qu'il suppose sans la découvrir. Le sujet ne compte plus ou s'il compte c'est à peine" (1950: 13)].

Another affinity lies in the fact that both Sá-Carneiro and Apollinaire defend the honesty of the Cubist works, which was obviously questioned at the time. When referring specifically to Pablo Picasso, Sá-Carneiro utterly expresses his admiration for the rigueur and mastery of the Spanish painter's pre-Cubist works: "admirable drawings and etchings that cause us sometimes – with the simplest of means – the genial chills of Edgar Pöe," ["admiráveis desenhos e águas-fortes que nos causam por vezes – com os meios mais simples – os calafrios geniais de Edgar Pöe"] (Sá-Carneiro, 2001: 53). Sá-Carneiro then goes on to state his trust in the seriousness of Picasso's goals: "I cannot believe that this great artist today would transform himself into a simple jokster [*blagueur*] who smears picaresque curves and writes underneath: 'The Violinist.' No, this cannot be the case" ["Eu não posso crer que este grande artista hoje se transformasse num simples blagueur que borra curvas picarescas e por baixo escreve: 'O Violinista'. Não; isto não pode ser assim"] (Sá-Carneiro, 2001: 53). Apollinaire too had addressed the issue of the honesty of the Cubists: "It has sometimes been suggested, and particularly with respect to the latest generation of painters, that a collective hoax or mistake may have been perpetrated. | Now in the history of the arts there has never been a single case of a hoax or mistake being collective" (Apollinaire, 2004: 21) ["On a parfois, et notamment à propos des artistes-peintres les plus récents, envisagé la possibilité d'une mystification ou d'une erreur collectives. | Or, on ne connaît pas dans toute l'histoire des arts une seule mystification collective, non plus qu'une erreur artistique collective" (1950: 23)].

Moreover, in his article “The Young Generation. Picasso, Painter,” published for the first time in *La plume* in 15 May 1915, and later in *The Cubist Painters*, Apollinaire also started by recollecting the pre-Cubist works of Picasso, to use the very same image that Sá-Carneiro applies in his letter (that of “genial chills” [“calafrios geniais”]): the “Malagan scathed us like a sudden chill” (Apollinaire, 2004: 35) [“Ce Malaguêgne nous meurtrissait comme un froid bref” (1950: 35)]. The affinities of the argumentations between Apollinaire and Sá-Carneiro are indeed striking, and illustrate without a doubt that in 1913 Sá-Carneiro was familiarized with the main arguments in support of the Cubist movement, regardless of having read them first-hand or simply having gleaned them from the atmosphere of his Parisian circles. These topics were discussed avidly and continuously, including those points taking the side of the Cubists. That Sá-Carneiro was exposed to these discussions – and to Cubist side of it, no less – does not come as a surprise. It is important however to identify their echoes in his own literary and epistolary speech, since this demonstrates that Sá-Carneiro was indeed close to these artistic groups, and that his presence in the French capital did not come down to writing, isolated, at a table of Café Riche, in a sort of alienated bubble, as the poet has sometimes been described and perceived, but rather led to a dynamic relation with the creative atmosphere surrounding him.

In another letter to Fernando Pessoa, Sá-Carneiro refers to a creation of his, “Bailado” [“Dance”], as a “cubist” text, although it would seem that the descriptor is used to mark Santa-Rita’s view of that work (Sá-Carneiro, 2001: 84), more than his own, or alternatively to convey that idea to Pessoa. Santa-Rita had considered the text “beautiful,” and surprisingly declared that Sá-Carneiro, as an author, was undeserving of the quality of his own creation, leading the poet to state in his letter: “Therefore my *cubist* work, was not worthy of me” (2001:85).

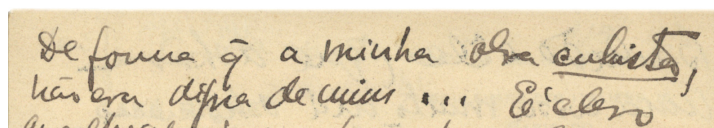


Fig. 7. BNP/EP, 115^a-122^a (detail):

“De forma q[ue] a minha obra *cubista*, não era digna de mim...”

Given Santa-Rita’s appreciation for the Cubist approach, he decided to illustrate this poem, and made to Sá-Carneiro a number of proposals which the latter considered absurd, but that did not result in a negative view of Cubism altogether; quite the contrary: “I could see in this [project] what Santa Rita’s art was (I would not say that about the Cubists)” (Sá-Carneiro, 2001: 85).

In a previous letter Sá-Carneiro described to Pessoa the project of “Além,” a text developed at the same time as “Bailado.” It engages highly abstract – and arguably arbitrary – geometric imagery, such as that of a poet surrounded by “‘picaresque cage of lozenges’ spinning vertiginously around his body,” or a

“hedious horse race of acute angles that starts running over her ideal body [the body of the naked lover] and materialize it scornfully, mocking its curves and whirlpools” [“‘Uma gaiola picaresca de losangos” (...) a girar vertiginosamente em volta do meu corpo’ (...) ‘cavalgada medonha dos ângulos agudos que se lança em tropel sobre o seu corpo ideal (o corpo da amante nua) a materializá-lo escarninhamente, zombando das curvas e dos redemoinhos”] (Sá-Carneiro, 2001: 43). Sá-Carneiro himself recognizes the oddity of the imagery and justifies in his letters: “You realize that all of this is very strange. Nevertheless I feel it” [“Você compreende que tudo isto é muito estranho. No entanto eu sinto-o” (2001: 43)]. This confessed surprise seems to expose a certain blindness in that Sá-Carneiro’s artistic creations are starting to be influenced by the surrounding cultural production, regardless of the author’s conscious adhesion– or lack thereof – to those same languages, or in any case regardless of his willingness to admit it to Fernando Pessoa.

In Sá-Carneiro’s descriptions of both “Bailado” and “Além” it seems clear that the poet is fascinated with the creative potential of geometric forms (lozenges, acute angles, curves, and whirlpools) in such a way that could enhance – by blurring and sometimes exploding – the limits of classic representation. In my view, it is this perspective that always characterizes Sá-Carneiro’s interpretation of and experimentation with the Cubist language, even as he attempts to engage it in literary form. This can be easily understood given that the fascination with the geometric shape was having its heyday at the time, as can be seen in Apollinaire’s explanation of the Cubists’ search for a fourth dimension, to which geometric shapes were seen as instrumental:

The new painters have been roundly criticised for their interest in geometry. And yet geometry is the essence of drawing. Geometry, the science of space, its measurement and relationships, has always been the basic rule of painting. (...) The new painters do not claim to be geometers any more than painters of the past did. But it is true that geometry is to plastic arts what grammar is to the art of the writer.

(Apollinaire, 2004: 15)

[On a vivement reproché aux artistes-peintres nouveaux des préoccupations géométriques. Cependant les figures géométriques sont l’essentiel du dessin. La géométrie, science qui a pour objet l’étendue, sa mesure et ses rapports, a été de tous temps la règle même de la peinture. (...) Les nouveaux peintres, pas plus que leurs anciens ne se sont proposé d’être des géomètres. Mais on peut dire que la géométrie est aux arts plastiques ce que la grammaire est à l’art de l’écrivain.]

(1950 : 17)

An instance of Cubist experimentation in Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s work has already been pointed out by Alfredo Margarido. For Margarido, Sá-Carneiro’s Cubism is essentially visible in the September 1915 poem “Five O’Clock” [“Cinco Horas”], particularly in the first three quartets, which in Margarido’s opinion

represent “the most poetic tendency that Cubism found amongst” the Portuguese literary production (1990: 98). In these stanzas Sá-Carneiro describes a scene at the café: “My table at the Café | I want it so much... the bright one | All made of polished stone | How beautiful and fresh it is! || A green syphon in the middle | And, next to it, the matchbox | In front of my glass full | With a light drink. || (I always banned the liqueurs | Which I find less ornamental: | Syrups have colors | More lively and more brutal)” (97) [“Minha mesa no Café | Quero-lhe tanto... A garrida | Toda de pedra brunida | Que linda e que fresca é! || Um sifão verde no meio | E, ao seu lado, a fosforeira | Diante ao meu copo cheio | Duma bebida ligeira. || (Eu bani sempre os licores | Que acho pouco ornamentais: | Os xaropes têm cores | mais vivas e mais brutais)"]. Margarido is very right in stating that the description forms a “space unseen before” in Portuguese poetry and painting, due to the representation of what he calls a “Parisian-Cubist” scene, formed by the furniture and objects of the café, which become the center of the scene. As he points out, even the drinks described seem to be chosen for their “chromatic potential” (Margarido: 1990, 99), to assist in composing the scene.

In my view, equally relevant as these three stanzas of “Five O’Clock,” which could be perceived as the potential ekphrasis of a typical Cubist painting, descriptive of a relatively stable composition, the poem “Manucure” engages with forms of representation that attempt to emulate the Cubist processes themselves, in a far more developed way than attempted with “Além” and “Bailado.”

The desire to present a “movement of the air,” which as we saw was one of Sá-Carneiro’s interpretations of the Cubist project, is precisely the task the poet undertakes in “Manucure.” Earlier on, in a letter of 2 December 1912, Sá-Carneiro had declared his wish to “[t]ell the tragedy of the air, the pains and joys of the air – the air as being, as individual” (2001: 20). In “Manucure,” a poem written already between March and May 1915 and published in *Orpheu* 2, Sá-Carneiro defines the perfect setting to accomplish that goal, by placing himself in the center of a Parisian café, surrounded by multiple mirrors that fragment his reflected gaze. The poem is known for employing a number of Futurist techniques, such as the “typographic dispersion” highlighted by Fernando Cabral Martins (1994: 282), to which I would add the reproduction of commercial logos, the sequences of numbers or sequences of onomatopoeias used as poem lines, all of which contribute to the definition of a Parisian and more broadly European atmosphere of commercial development, largely associated with an experience of speed. At the same time, the poetic subject tells us in “Manucure” that Paris is the location in which a new vision results from the specific cohabitation of divergent ways of seeing: “my Futurist eyes, my Cubist eyes, my Intersectionist eyes” (2010: 45). I interpret the passage as stating that Paris is the center where the subject familiarizes himself with the Futurist and Cubist modes of expression that allow for the kind of imagery used in “Manucure”. And I furthermore suggest that these

visions – Cubism and Futurism – are in fact the most crucial elements for defining Sá-Carneiro's "Intersectionist eyes," which adopts the more loosely defined esthetic descriptor created by Fernando Pessoa for a literary style associated with the main authors of *Orpheu*.

Among the multiple brief theorizations about Intersectionism, I point a passage drafted in a "Manifesto" in Portuguese, in which Pessoa distinguishes:

Intersection of the Object with itself: Cubism. (I.e., intersection of the several aspects of the Object with each other).

Intersection of the Object with the objective ideas it suggests: Futurism.

Intersection of the Object with the sensation of it: Intersectionism, the actual one, ours.

[Intersecção do Objecto consigo proprio: cubismo. (Isto é, intersecção dos varios aspectos do mesmo Objecto uns com os outros).

Intersecção do Objecto com as idéas objectivas que suggere: Futurismo.

Intersecção do Objecto com a sensação d'elle: Interseccionismo, propriamente dito; o nosso.]

(2009: 122; BNP/E3, 88-17^r)

Besides illustrating that Pessoa was perhaps not as familiar with the full scope of the Cubist and Futurist works, or not enough to distinguish them more thoroughly, as well as demonstrating Pessoa's desire to distinguish the production of the Portuguese writers from other European avant-gardes, the quotation shows even at a more basic level the influence of the perception of a new form of representation resulting from the intersection of planes, which is a crucial breakthrough of Cubism, in the conceptualization of Intersectionism.⁶

With regard to Sá-Carneiro's passage in "Manucure," we can say that if the Futurist eyes, that is, the Futurist modes of expression integrated in "Manucure," have been pointed out before by criticism, the same has not happened with Sá-Carneiro's experimentation with Cubist techniques, which in my view has not received sufficient critical attention. In many passages of "Manucure", Sá-Carneiro's Cubist figuration can be described as the representation of different objects or physical spaces, or even more abstract concepts, in an always fragmented vision, that blurs or intersects multiple angles, to which the effects of the mirrors and glass panes in the Café contribute decisively.

The poetic subject occupies a central position in the space of the café, and considers "all these things driving through space" in his direction, "numberless

⁶ This becomes evident in other definitions of Intersectionism that also bring to comparison Cubism and Futurism and the notion of intersection or superposition of planes, at more physical or abstract levels. This is case of the one in which Pessoa states: "Intersectionist Art – intersection and interpenetration of physical and psychical [...] | Symbolism, Cubism, Futurism are diverted /degrees/, inaccurate intuitions of this final and definitive art" ["Arte Interseccionista – intersecção e interpenetração do physico e do psychico (...) | O symbolismo, o cubismo, o futurismo são /graus/ transviados, intuições incorrectas d'esta arte ultima e definitiva"] (2009: 111; BNP/E3, 75-9^r).

intersections | Of multiple, free, lubricious planes” [“E tudo, tudo assim me é conduzido no espaço | Por inúmeras intersecções de planos | Múltiplos, livres, resvalantes”] (42). In these merging panes or intersecting reflections, air itself is captured and, more importantly, the very air is both revealed and in fact made more beautiful: “I stand... | And I fall flat! | In the back, and even more excessively, mirrors reflect⁷ | Everything ashimmer in the air, | With an even subtler beauty shining through...” [“Levanto-me... | – Derrota! | Ao fundo, em maior excesso, há espelhos que reflectem | Tudo quanto oscila pelo Ar: | Mais belo através deles, A mais subtil destaque...”] (51). It is the very merging of fragmented planes and the reflection – and perhaps the refraction – of light that is perceived as beautifying the space, as in a live Cubist scene transposed to words.

The fragmented view provided by the clash of surfaces projected in different mirrors in the Café contributes directly to a representation that matches those of multiple planes of the same objects presented in the Cubist paintings. These aimed to provide multiple angles of one same reality and in doing so allow for a notion of movement or a better, more complete, knowledge of the concept or action represented, something observed in the description of the scene in the café, wherein the mirrors provide an “even subtler beauty” to those elements reflected.

Passages of “Manucure” also exhibit a clear obsession with regular geometric shapes used to describe the surrounding atmosphere of objects that gain a life of their own:

– Look at the tables... Eia! Eia!
 Cabriolets fly straight up into the Air
 In an instantaneous series of quads and spaces —
 There – but already, farther off, in distant, removed lozenges...⁸
 [...]
 And higher still, in oblique planes,
 Airy symbolisms of tenuous heraldry
 Dazzle the checkered of the straw chairs⁹
 Which, startled from their horizontal sleep,
 Also arise in a sarabande...
 [...]
 – How much for my banal porcelain teacup?

Ah, exhaled in amphoric Greek curves,
 Rising in a spiral, ciliate vortex,
 Convex edge shooting gold...

[– Olha as mesas... Eia! Eia!
 Lá vão todas no Ar às cabriolas,

⁷ I change slightly the original translation: “Deep down and even more excessively, mirrors reflect.”

⁸ I change slightly the original translation: “But already, farther off, in distant, removed lozenges...”

⁹ I change slightly the original translation: “Dazzle chessmen at the feet of the chairs.”

Em séries instantâneas de quadrados
 Ali – mas já, mais longe, em losangos desviados...
 (...)
 E, mais alto, em planos oblíquos,
 Simbolismos aéreos de heráldicas ténues
 Deslumbram os xadrezes dos fundos de palhinha
 Das cadeiras que, estremunhadas em seu sono horizontal,
 Vá lá, se erguem também na sarabanda...
 (...)
 – Quanto à minha chávena banal de porcelana?
 Ah, essa esgota-se em curvas gregas de ânfora,
 Ascende num vértice de espiras
 Que o seu rebordo frisado a ouro emite...] (44-45)

Mário de Sá-Carneiro's proposal was innovative in its time in the sense that it attempted to recreate in literature an expressive strategy gleaned from the plastic arts of the period, namely painting and sculpture. In fact Sá-Carneiro experiments with the creation of a poetic form of Cubism that focuses on scenes and stills described dynamically in their different angles and facets. As such, he places his poetic subject in the center of the very reality that is perceived as shattered in dynamic Cubist representations, often alike plausible Cubist paintings. In that sense, Sá-Carneiro's experimental version of Cubism is radically different, for example, from Gertrude Stein's methodic repetition and alteration of phrases or passages in streams of text, in which the changes incorporated keep providing diverse insights generated in the slightly different passages, parallel to the different angles included in a Cubist painting.

The most avant-garde characteristics of Mário de Sá-Carneiro's "Manucure" have often been undervalued critically due to a remark by Fernando Pessoa in which he states that the poem was made as a "blague," a joke. This remark is included in a bio-bibliographic note on Mário de Sá-Carneiro published in the literary journal *presença* 16, in November 1928, and therefore thirteen years after the original publication of the poem in *Orpheu*, the journal developed by both poets (Pessoa, 200: 374). In it Pessoa notes that "Mário de Sá-Carneiro collaborated often in newspapers and magazines, mostly before 1912, but only part of this collaboration" can be used in a future edition of his work: "(1) the semi-futurist poem (with the intention of making a *blague*) *Manucure*, in *Orpheu* 2", along with two newspaper opinion pieces (Pessoa, 1999: 374). Farther in the note, Pessoa notes that with regard to the "future edition of his work, left up to Fernando Pessoa," it will include, "among others, the poem *Manucure*, despite the fact that it is a *blague*" (Pessoa, 2000: 375). ["Mário de Sá-Carneiro colaborou bastante em jornais e revistas, sobretudo anteriormente a 1912, mas dessa colaboração são aproveitáveis só: (1) o poema semi-futurista (feito com intenção de blague) *Manucure*, in *Orpheu* 2"; "Sobre a futura edição da sua obra, deixada ao encargo de Fernando Pessoa, dela constarão, entre outros, "o poema *Manucure*, apesar de blague"].

Pessoa's statements about "Manucure" make it sound, as Fernando Cabral Martins has pointed out, that "Manucure" is "a Futurist poem without adhesion to Futurism" ["um poema futurista sem adesão ao Futurismo"] (1994: 280). However, as Cabral Martins has also noted, "the aim of this opinion is more that of placing the text in the context of the avant-garde, and, at the same time, to mark his [Pessoa's] own refusal of that avant-garde of which he partakes" ["o sentido dessa opinião de Pessoa é mais o de situar o texto no contexto da vanguarda, e, ao mesmo tempo, marcar a sua própria recusa dessa Vanguarda de que também participa"] (Martins, 1994: 80). I believe it is even possible to talk about an instance of critical blindness by Pessoa, largely motivated by the distance in time between this note, published in 1928, and *Orpheu*, of 1915. But the comments owe perhaps to more than the time lapsed. They highlight that essential aspect of Pessoa's relation with the avant-gardes that has been pointed out by Jerónimo Pizarro: "Pessoa was only temporarily and superficially a Futurist" (2012: 114) ["Pessoa foi apenas passageira e superficialmente futurista"]. And in my view, Pessoa's main statement stems also from the fact that the influence of the avant-gardes in him was smaller than that experienced by Sá-Carneiro, who was in contact first-hand with the new languages developed in Paris and was more permeable to them.

What is clear is that in 1915, both Fernando Pessoa and Sá-Carneiro wanted *Orpheu* to take up a side of public provocation, as happened with the avant-gardes, regardless of the degree of adhesion to it, or of how long that would last.

Evidencing this desire to provoke the literary field is the fact that Mário de Sá-Carneiro insists with Pessoa to establish a contact with the Futurists, and that this request is made in a sentence where Sá-Carneiro makes the caricature of the group: "Make sure to send *Orpheu* to the twerps" (2001: 119) ["Não deixe de enviar o *Orfeu* aos homenzinhos"]. That has been noted by Jerónimo Pizarro, who in fact suggests that "Sá-Carneiro, co-director along with Fernando Pessoa of *Orpheu* 2, had some interest – presumably more than Pessoa – in contacting the Futurists" (2012: 119). An idea that makes all the more sense, I would add here, given that Sá-Carneiro in fact was living in the very epicenter of the development of these avant-gardes. Pessoa and Sá-Carneiro's ambiguous stands in relation to the avant-gardes are visible also in that Sá-Carneiro's desire to send to the Futurists the volume *Orpheu* 2, which includes "Manucure," is expressed in the letter of 13 August 1915, in which Sá-Carneiro refers to having bought *I Poeti Futuristi* and to a visit to Gallery Sagot, described as a "Cubist-Futurist temple" ["templo cubista futurista"] (2001: 191). Adding to that ambiguity with regard to the Futurists, in particular, is the fact that Sá-Carneiro's "Manucure" includes the provocative formula that values the Portuguese Modernists over the Parisian circles, as pointed out by Pizarro (2012: 119): "Marinetti + Picasso = Paris < Santa Rita Pin- | tor + Fernando Pessoa | Alvaro de Campos | !!!". In my view, more than embodying a rejection of these movements and authors by Sá-Carneiro, the passage in the poem illustrates

above all that the provocative spirit of “Manucure” makes it attack, at certain points, those authors whose very languages were more deeply influential than admitted and who contributed with the strategy of shock taken up by *Orpheu*.

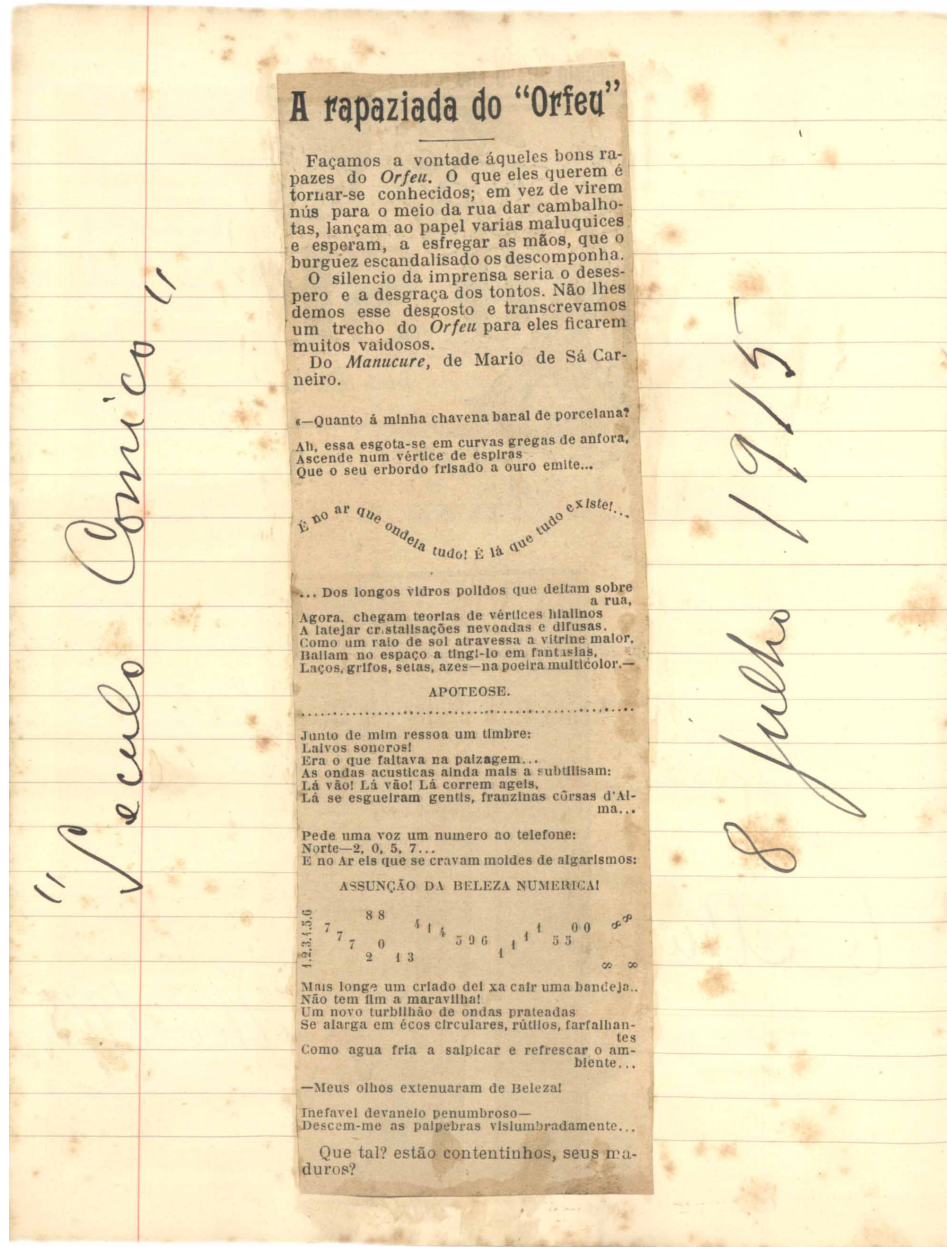


Fig. 8. "The Young Fellows of 'Orpheu,'" a review of *Orpheu* 2 published in the newspaper *Século Comico*, included in a notebook used by Mário de Sá-Carneiro and Fernando Pessoa (Ms. BNP 156-10^v).

As the title insinuates, the review satirizes the journal, by claiming that the main objective of its authors was to have “the scandalized bourgeois insult them” and stating that the silence of the press would be a disappointment to the authors in the journal. As such, instead of lashing out against it, the reviewers choose to provide what they see ironically as moderate consolation, and trivialize *Orpheu* by highlighting the irreverence of “Manucure” in particular.

Still with regard to the above-referred letter, it should be noted that Sá-Carneiro was keeping Pessoa up to date on the visibility of the Parisian avant-gardes, having returned to Paris in mid-July 1915. And in the letter sent the week before, in August 7 1915, he states:

Cubism: I thought in fact it had vanished with the war: all the more so since certain newspapers said that the cubes of *bouillon* and in painting were *boche* [German]. But in Sagod [sic], an art dealer who took in the Futurists and Cubists and will not sell any other product – not only *are *there *displayed many Cubist paintings but also – oh! what surprise! – one of the war; last trend: yes: a “taube between shrappnels [sic]...”. The *marchand’s* street is narrow but there are always people in front, laughing, like in front of our shop window with Orpheu.

– Cubismo: julguei em verdade que tivesse desaparecido com a guerra: tanto mais que certos jornais diziam que os cubos do caldo (bouillon kub) e da pintura eram boches. Mas no Sagod [sic] – negociante de quadros que acolheu os futuristas e os cubistas, e não vende doutra mercadoria – não só *estão *expostos m[ui]tos quadros cubistas como – oh! pasmo! – um da guerra; ultima actualidade: sim: um “taube entre shrappnels,, [sic]. A rua do “marchand,, é de pouca passagem, mas sempre gente parada defronte, rindo: como em face da nossa montra do Orfeu...

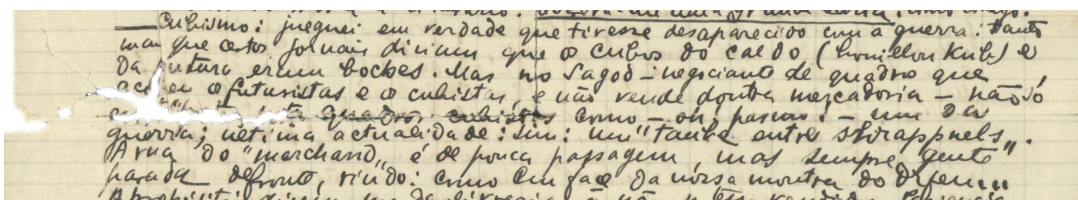


Fig. 9. BNP/E3, 115^o-47^o (detail).

The quotation denotes the visibility of Cubism in the Parisian cultural circles before and after World War I – the sort of visibility that “Manucure” in itself had reflected months before – as well as Sá-Carneiro’s uncertainty with regard to the impact that the military conflict would have in the production and divulging of the avant-gardes. The quotation is very rich for its references to the Parisian artistic field and Sá-Carneiro’s exposure to it. The mention to the “bouillon kub” is likely a reference to the company Knorr (German, at the time), which had just launched this product in 1912; according to Sá-Carneiro, the bouillon cubes and likewise Cubism and Futurism were equally perceived as German creations. More importantly, however, is the reference to the art dealer here named “Sagod.” Sá-Carneiro is in all certainty talking about Clovis Sagot (with a *t*, not a *d*), who had a Gallery near Montmartre, specifically at 46 Rue Laffitte, in fact a smaller street perpendicular to Rue Châteaudun and Rue La Fayette. Sagot’s preference for Cubism and Futurism, as noted in the passage, is well known as indeed the art dealer sold works by Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso, who even painted Sagot’s portrait. It is worth noting that Mário de Sá-Carneiro constantly circulated in this region of the city, a center for the avant-garde production. A very immediate proof

of that is the simple fact that the passage above is taken from a letter sent in an envelope of the “Brasserie Châteaudun,” located precisely at the Carrefour Châteaudun, and, like most letters by Sá-Carneiro from this time period, from the nearby post office in the Boulevard des Italiens.



Fig. 10. A detail of the envelope associated with Mário de Sá-Carneiro's letter to Fernando Pessoa of 7 August 1915 (BNP/E3, 115⁶-46^o).

The word *taube* (German for *dove*) refers to a German bomber aircraft shaped as a stylized dove which was used in World War I, and that entered the common vocabulary of the day, such was its relevance to the conflict. As per the Cubist painting of the war mentioned by Sá-Carneiro, a hypothetical “*taube* between *shrappnels*” [sic], note that if the inverted commas were to refer to a specific title, this is not a work of art immediately recognizable today. Therefore, and taking into consideration the brief description of the painting, it is unlikely we will be able to identify it exactly. It would be tempting to consider that Sá-Carneiro was referring to the painting *Pursuing a Taube*, also known as *Taube Pursued by Commander Samson*, by Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson, which was presented by Nevinson at the London Group's exhibit at the Goupil Gallery in London, in March 1915. However, and according to what I was told by Michael Walsh, art historian and Nevinson's biographer, the painting was subsequently exhibited at the Alpine Club in April 1915, and afterwards at Nevinson's solo exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in September 1916. The probability that this painting had been on display at Sagot's gallery still in 1915, during the war period, therefore seems to me not high, even if there is no absolute certainty about this. Could it have been a draft of this or another work by Nevinson, or a painting by someone else, perhaps even inspired by Nevinson's success with the theme in London earlier in the year? I should point out that Nevinson, who was close to Cubists, Futurists, and Vorticists, is usually regarded as the main painter of World War I and certainly the first to display the importance of airborne combat in it (Walsh, 2004). Nevinson lived in Paris for different periods of time, was fully immersed in the avant-garde movements, and was in France when the war started, being in touch, in fact, with the Sagot family, as he indicated in his autobiography

(1938: 92). Having left the French capital at the onset of the war, Nevinson only returned to the city in 1917, however, and therefore should the painting seen by Sá-Carneiro in the Summer of 1915 have been his, it would have been taken there by a third party.

What the passage does demonstrate is that the painting observed took Sá-Carneiro by surprise, upon his return to the French capital in the Summer of 1915. According to it, Sá-Carneiro was unsure about the survival of the movement and had not anticipated that Cubism would take up the ongoing military conflict – despite the multiple passages in his own work and correspondence in which he alludes to the creative stimulus he felt arising from the omnipresence of the war.

Finally, the passage in the letter unequivocally identifies a spirit of public provocation common to Cubism and *Orpheu*, one that was furthermore cherished by Sá-Carneiro. Ultimately, that desire to *épater le bourgeois* intentionally shared by *Orpheu* and the avant-gardes makes it impossible to relativize the importance of “Manucure” – having been written as *blague* or not. Such underestimation was certainly not even Pessoa’s point, given that he planned to include “Manucure” in the edited works of Sá-Carneiro, to begin with. This inclusion happens because the desire to shock the masses, that was inscribed in the matrix of avant-garde discourses, was indeed one of the main legacies of the avant-gardes passed on to the Portuguese Modernist movement and as such needed to be given due credit.

As demonstrated, Mário de Sá-Carneiro occupies the role of a central figure in transmitting the influences of the Parisian avant-gardes to Portuguese literary Modernism and in the relation between a center and a periphery represented by Paris and Lisbon, in a way that was almost inevitable, given his immersion in the Parisian cultural atmosphere and his familiarization with the esthetic debates of the day. In this context, “Manucure” is a clear example of a text from *Orpheu* in which we can find the echoes of the Parisian avant-gardes, both in the adoption of a daring attitude inspired in Cubism and Futurism, and in the actual experimentation with the Futurist and Cubist languages. Sá-Carneiro’s Cubist imagery, in particular, which has been less discussed, was original in the sense that it attempted to create scenes in which both the individual being and other elements and concepts – including air itself – are placed in the center of a fragmented reality that is represented dynamically through geometric shapes and in multiple angles, as in ekphrastic recreations of potential Cubist works.

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